



DIRECTOR'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Modifications to Minimum Parking and Open Space Requirements within the First Hill Urban Village

Introduction

The Department of Design, Construction and Land Use (DCLU) is proposing amendments to the Land Use Code that are consistent with City and neighborhood goals to remove obstacles to the development of new housing in the First Hill Neighborhood. The amendments would make the residential parking requirements in the First Hill Neighborhood better reflect car ownership trends and change open space requirements for residential uses in commercial zones to mirror requirements in multifamily zones.

The proposed amendments would apply only within the First Hill Urban Village and would accomplish the following:

- Revise the minimum residential parking requirement for multifamily uses to one parking space per dwelling unit;
- Modify the City's State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) parking policies to be consistent with the proposed parking requirement; and
- Ensure equity in open space requirements for residential uses whether located in a commercial or residential zone.

Background

During the neighborhood planning process of the late 1990s, neighborhood planners from the First Hill Urban Village favored increased capacity to accommodate more housing and generally expressed a preference for the development of a variety of housing types. First Hill residents perceive that their neighborhood already has an abundance of institutional uses and special needs housing and a limited supply of market rate housing. Fostering the development of market rate and workforce housing is a practical way to balance the overall mix of uses in the neighborhood, providing for a fuller range of housing for different income levels in addition to the institutional development in the neighborhood.

First Hill needs housing targeted for households earning 80% of median income (\$35,000 to \$65,000 annually). Market analyses indicate there are 30,000 people working on First Hill within this income bracket, and these workers are predominantly single, between 25 and 45 years old, and want to work and be close to urban amenities.¹ First Hill can accommodate these workers, but land costs are high and the development must take place in larger buildings to be economically viable.

¹ Harbor Properties, Inc., Presentation on Creating More Affordable Housing (80% of median) for those working in the First Hill and Cascade Neighborhoods (April 2003).

In addition to addressing First Hill neighborhood planning goals, the proposal follows up on recent steps taken to address emerging land use issues resulting from a flagging economy. Several measures were taken last year to apply citywide and others focused on new development in the First Hill Neighborhood, including:

- Revisions to permit expiration rules, eliminating the expense and process of annual MUP renewals while assuring that permitted projects meet the most current codes during the life of the permit;
- Allowing interim principal use parking in certain circumstances to enable some economic return on property where accessory parking is established for a use that was discontinued or where a partially constructed site cannot be completed; and
- Modification of Floor Area Ratio requirements for property zoned NC3-160 in the First Hill Urban Village, encouraging the mixing of two uses within a structure instead of three and removing limits on residential density.

These ordinances are intended to preserve the viability of development efforts on First Hill that were adversely affected by changing economic conditions, allowing projects that would further the vision of the First Hill Neighborhood Plan to proceed.

First Hill is well-suited to accommodate residential growth. The proposed amendments will spur development of residential and mixed-use development by reducing the minimum parking requirements, which do not reflect current car ownership trends in the neighborhood, and by amending open space requirements, to mirror requirements for Midrise zone residential development.

Analysis of Parking Requirements

The general parking requirement for multifamily uses ranges from a minimum of 1.1 to 1.5 parking spaces per unit, depending on the following factors:

- number of units,
- unit size, and
- number of bedrooms per unit.

Certain neighborhoods have parking quantity requirements that differ from the general requirement. For example, the Pike/Pine and Cascade neighborhoods, which share the distinction of being center city neighborhoods with First Hill, require a minimum of one space per unit. Downtown neighborhoods, such as Belltown and the International District, have no minimum requirement for residential uses. Appendix C lists minimum parking requirements for most residential uses.

Demand for parking vs. parking requirements. Minimum parking requirements are intended to reflect an estimate of minimum anticipated demand, coupled with allowances for guest parking and for maintenance and delivery vehicles. These factors are balanced against transportation policies that seek to reduce dependence on automobile use and promote wise use and sustainability of the urban environment. There are different methods available for estimating parking demand for residential use. The 2000 Census

offers data on “vehicles available per household.” Measuring vehicles available per household results in a slightly higher number per household than, for example, measuring car ownership, because it may include vehicles not parked at home as well as vehicles parked at home but not owned by a resident, such as work vehicles or borrowed cars. “Vehicles available per household,” however, is a reliable predictor of residential parking behavior.

The 2000 Census data confirms a pattern where households in center city neighborhoods own fewer cars, on the whole, than households in neighborhoods beyond the center. Center city neighborhoods (the following urban villages: Uptown, South Lake Union, Capitol Hill, Pike/Pine, First Hill, and 12th Avenue) are located near employment centers and necessary goods and services, and are well served by transit. In other neighborhoods, established land use patterns make owning a car more of a necessity to daily household activities. Applying the same minimum parking requirement to center city neighborhoods imposes a costly burden on housing development, increasing the cost of housing, by requiring construction of off-street parking that may go unused and is not supported by car ownership patterns.

Analysis of 2000 Census data shows that one parking space per residential unit – the same requirement that applies in the Pike/Pine and Cascade neighborhoods – would be an appropriate minimum requirement on First Hill. The census information shows that out of 5,121 households in the First Hill Urban Village, average vehicles available per household is 0.6 vehicles. Of these, 699 units were owner-occupied and 4,422 units were renter-occupied. The 699 owner-occupied units had a total of 647 vehicles available, an average of 0.92 vehicles per household. The 4,422 renter-occupied units had 2,244 vehicles available, for an average of 0.51 vehicles per unit. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Vehicles Available per Household in First Hill (2000 Census)

Unit Type:	Owner-occupied	Renter-occupied	All units
Number of vehicles available	0.9 (0.92)	0.5 (0.51)	0.6 (0.56)

The higher prevalence of smaller housing units occupied by one- or two-person households, and the convenience presented by locations on First Hill, largely explains the lower number of vehicles available per household and in other center city neighborhoods. A parking study prepared in 1998 by Heffron Transportation confirms this phenomenon in terms of parking demand rather than vehicle availability.²

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. DCLU's proposal supports the neighborhood goal of planning for sufficient parking on First Hill. It also strongly supports the First Hill Neighborhood Plan goal of creating a mixed-use community where one can live,

² Heffron Transportation, October 1998.

work and play without reliance on an automobile. The latter goal is consistent with, among others, policies G15 and G16 of the Seattle Comprehensive Plan.³ (See Appendix A.)

- G15: Provide enough parking to sustain the economic viability and vitality of commercial areas while discouraging commuting by single-occupant vehicle.
- G16: Reduce use of cars over time, particularly for commute trips.

Transit availability on First Hill. The proximity to a variety of transit services makes it easier for neighborhood residents to choose alternatives to single-occupant vehicle travel and automobile ownership. Much of the existing transit service in First Hill consists of downtown-oriented in-city bus routes operating on Madison, James-Jefferson, and Seneca connecting downtown to the Capitol Hill and Central District neighborhoods east of First Hill. These bus routes are long-standing routes with frequent all-day service. Several new routes provide all-day connections to additional Seattle neighborhoods and peak-commuter service to city and suburban park and rides. A downtown shuttle service operates in the southern end of First Hill, operating in a loop on James and Yesler. The western portions of First Hill are within walking distance of the King County/Metro Ride Free zone. A local car-sharing organization, Flexcar, also has several car-sharing stations located on First Hill and within walking distance on Capitol Hill.

Affordable housing. The Code required amount of parking for residential uses is a significant cost in the construction of housing in the First Hill neighborhood. Off-street parking makes up more than ten percent of the per unit cost of single-family houses and condominiums. In Seattle, developers generally report that structured parking costs between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per space, depending on such factors as location, land costs, parking demand, and zoning. These parking costs are passed on to tenants and condominium owners.

SEPA parking policies. The City's SEPA Parking Policies in Section 25.05.675M currently allow parking impact mitigation for projects located outside of downtown zones, the Seattle Cascade Mixed zone and the Pike/Pine neighborhood to be provided in the form of increased parking ratios (i.e., requiring more parking than the minimum required by the Land Use Code). This approach is based on the likelihood that spillover parking will occur on the surrounding supply of on-street parking. On First Hill, however, most of the on-street supply is time-limited through the use of meters or Residential Parking Zones, and an environmental analysis of a given project's parking and transportation impacts would take into account the availability of transit and the lower percentage of households that own cars. In neighborhoods like downtown, Pike/Pine and Cascade, SEPA authority for requiring more off-street parking is not needed due to these factors and, in some cases, SEPA authority can work against City

³ Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, Toward a Sustainable Seattle, A plan for Managing Growth, 1994-2014, last amended in 2002.

policies and neighborhood goals to enhance pedestrian and transit use and reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicles.

Analysis of Open Space Requirements in Commercial Zones

Comprehensive plan policies call for providing residential open space in commercially zoned areas as an important quality of life amenity while at the same time encouraging residential uses in commercial areas. (See Appendix A.)

- L173: Provide open space as part of mixed-use and single-purpose residential developments in commercial areas to ensure open space amenities are available to residents and employees.
- L168: Allow residential use in neighborhood commercial areas to encourage housing in close proximity to shopping services and employment opportunities.
- L172: Limit lot coverage above the ground floor for structures containing residential uses to maintain compatibility with the scale and character of commercial areas and their surroundings, and to limit the impact on views.

Current open space requirements for residential uses in commercial zones were first introduced in 1988 (Ordinance 113892). Since that time, no significant changes have been made to the provisions, even though substantial changes were made in 1989 to establish appropriate open space requirements for residential uses in multifamily zones (Ordinance 114887) without making corresponding changes for residential uses in commercial zones. Consequently, and unintentionally, a significantly greater amount of open space is required for residential uses in commercial zones than in multifamily zones. Table 2 illustrates this issue:

Table 2: Open Space Requirement Comparison; Midrise and Commercial Zones

Total Number of Units on 20,000 sf lot	Midrise Zone – Minimum Required Open Space (in square feet)	Commercial Zone – Minimum Required Open Space (in square feet)
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Total</u>
40 Units	5,000	6,400
50 Units	5,000	8,000
60 Units	5,000	9,600
70 Units	5,000	11,200

Requiring an amount of open space based on the residential floor of a building would appear to make sense. However, Table 2 clearly shows that the resulting open space requirement can exceed the total lot area, making development difficult within a reasonable cost per dwelling unit and arguably exceeding the minimum necessary to serve the residents of the building.

Open space requirements are intended to provide a minimum amount of open space necessary to enhance quality of life for the residents of a building. Open space in commercial zones is most commonly provided in the form of rooftop or private decks and balconies. Open space is typically provided as a combination of private usable open space⁴ and a common area of usable open space intended for all residents.

Requirements for open space in commercial zones arguably should mirror that required for residential use in multifamily zones. Requiring more open space than is warranted results in either more expensive housing or fewer dwelling units, and frequently both. In multifamily zones, open space is required to be provided at ground level, as well as above ground in the form of balconies, decks or roof decks. This is a reflection of the role that open space also provides in multifamily zones to enhance the general residential character of the neighborhood by landscaping required setbacks. However, requiring open space at ground level in commercial zones may serve to frustrate objectives for a vital streetfront pedestrian environment consisting of active commercial storefronts and pedestrian amenities. Therefore, given the scale of development anticipated in commercial zones in the First Hill Urban Village, an amount of open space equivalent to that required of residential developments in a Midrise residential zone should be sufficient to serve the needs of residents.

The proposed open space requirement for First Hill is based on a percentage of lot area, as follows:

Within the First Hill Urban Village, a minimum of twenty-five (25) percent of the lot area shall be provided as usable open space, except that in no case shall the open space requirement be greater than three hundred (300) square feet per unit.

While the consequence of the proposal will be to reduce the minimum amount of open space required of new residential development in commercial zones, it will result in requiring open space in an amount commensurate to a similar building in a residential zones. Open space will be able to provided above ground in the form of private balconies and common roof decks. In addition, minimum standards related to the dimensions of the space will remain in place. Furthermore, residential buildings in commercial zones offer their residents spaces for gathering that residential zones do not offer, in the form of livelier pedestrian streetscapes and hospitable businesses such as cafes, shops and public plazas.

⁴ “Usable open space” is subject to standards regarding to appropriate size, shape, location and topography. Also, to count as open space, balconies must be at least 60 square feet with no dimension less than 6 feet.

Recommendations

The Director recommends approval of the proposed amendments to achieve the following:

- *Set minimum parking requirements to reflect existing vehicle ownership patterns.* Reduced minimum parking requirements will help reduce the cost of housing for owners and renters, and supports neighborhood goals for residential redevelopment in the First Hill Neighborhood. For these reasons, DCLU recommends a minimum parking requirement of one parking space per dwelling unit in the First Hill Urban Village.
- *Conform residential open space requirements in First Hill's commercial zones to the requirements in most of its residential zones.* Disparate open space requirements are currently a barrier to needed residential development in commercial zones, and can be corrected while still meeting the open space needs of building users and tenants. Steps toward standardizing residential open space requirements for residential and commercial zones corrects an unintended consequence of incremental adoption over time of the Land Use Code by establishing fair and equitable requirements. DCLU recommends reducing the residential open space requirements in commercial zones in First Hill to approximate the amount required in its residential zones.
- *Modify SEPA parking policies to exempt residential uses on First Hill from requirements to provide more parking than the minimum required by the Land Use Code.* The urban conditions that permit residents of First Hill the convenience to live, work and play without reliance on single-occupant vehicles indicates that the use of SEPA authority to require more parking than the minimum required by the Land Use Code is both unnecessary and inappropriate. To make SEPA parking policies consistent with Seattle's parking regulations, DCLU recommends elimination of SEPA authority to require more parking in the First Hill Urban Village for residential uses than otherwise required by the Land Use Code.